

18th CONGRESS, }
1st Session.

[71]

MEMORIAL

OF

THE MERCHANTS, &c. OF PORTLAND,

AGAINST

The Tariff Bill.

FEBRUARY 12, 1824.

Committed to the committee of the whole House on the Tariff Bill.

WASHINGTON :

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1824.

MEMORIAL.

To the Honorable the Senate and House of Representatives in Congress assembled;

The undersigned Merchants, and others, residing in the town of Portland, in the state of Maine,

RESPECTFULLY REPRESENT:

That, with the utmost concern, we have seen a copy of a bill, introduced into the House of Representatives, for the purpose of laying additional duties on goods, wares, and merchandise, imported into the United States. The provisions therein, seem to your memorialists to be fraught with but little short of the utter destruction of the foreign commerce of the United States. This commerce has hitherto been struggling with many embarrassments; and, at the present moment, is but just able to keep itself afloat. That it has been the most valuable support to the best interest of this country will not be denied. That it has afforded four hundred millions of revenue, since the adoption of the Federal Constitution, furnishes no inconsiderable item, among the number of advantages which might be enumerated, as flowing from this source. That it has been the means of creating industry, and of diffusing wealth, throughout our happy country, in a degree hitherto unparalleled in any other region, in a similar space of time, would seem to be too obvious to require elucidation. That the proposed alteration in the Impost will go far to annihilate commerce, and, with it, the revenue of the Government, no member of Congress, as we must presume, can be so blinded by any conceivable species of infatuation, as not to fully comprehend. This being palpably the tendency of the measure, we must, of course, look for the motive—and a motive consistent with the public interest—which can satisfy the mind, and impel it to abandon a certain present good, for some expedient which can reasonably be believed to afford a prospect of something, redounding, in all respects, equally to the advantage of the community. This advantage in prospect, we are informed by the advocates of the measure, is predicated upon the hypothesis, that, by destroying commerce, manufactures will be fostered and reared up, to such an extent as to be, at least, equally productive to the revenue and to the prosperity of the country generally, to what commerce ever has been, or ever can be. If this position were proved, or believed to be susceptible of proof, your memorialists would cheerfully acquiesce in the measure. But, believing as they do, that

the scheme embraces an untried experiment in this country, where every thing differs, in this respect, from that of every other country; and, believing, moreover, that it is in the highest degree Utopian, they can but believe it the duty of the people to pause and consider, before they take this leap in the dark. A commerce once lost is not easily regained. Our rivals are numerous, and anxious to drive us from the competition. Is there any thing that Great Britain can more ardently desire, than to behold us, in this particular, committing absolute suicide? The Government of this country must have revenue: and will the manufacturers ever consent to make good the deficit which their scheme must occasion? Suppose the present revenue from commerce, ordinarily to equal sixteen millions per annum—and this is the minimum at which it can be rated—it would seem scarcely susceptible of a doubt, that the proposed scheme would diminish it, at least, one half. Will the manufacturers ever consent that eight millions of deficit should be made good by a direct tax upon them and their establishments? If the sacrifice is to be made for their benefit, ought they not to make it good? Or, is the great mass of the people to bear a direct tax for the benefit, exclusively, of, comparatively, a few individuals engaged in manufacturing establishments, to the amount, at least, of eight millions per annum?

The amount raised by direct taxation, since the organization of the Federal Government, has scarcely amounted to fifty millions of dollars: and we all recollect the difficulty, the vexation and popular excitements which attended its collection. A direct tax of eight millions in a year, in the most trying period of our history, has never been attempted: and, in a time of profound peace, would not be endured. It would be attended with a host of odious assessors, collectors and exactors, whom the people would not, and could not, tolerate.

On the other hand, the revenue, by impost, is collected by a very few individuals, and in a manner unperceived, and almost without a murmur. For a Government like ours, resting upon the basis of popular sentiment, and having its superstructure reared upon, and supported by, no other foundation; and the system for raising a revenue being its only feature, to adjust which, in conformity to that principle, might be expected to perplex the wisest heads; and the system of Impost having answered that end, and the system of direct taxation appearing utterly opposed to it,—will it be wise, or prudent, to hazard a change so momentous as the one in contemplation?

Your memorialists are, in no wise, opposed to the increase of manufactures. It is a species of industry worthy of encouragement. We rejoice, in common with the most sanguine of the manufacturers, in the success of their efforts. We only wish them to succeed, in the manner Agriculture and Commerce have succeeded, viz: by the intrinsic value of the employment; and not by tearing down, and trampling under foot, co-ordinate pursuits. We cannot be persuaded that it is reasonable to tax one species of industry for the support of another; and, much less to tax, and even crush, the very species of

industry which can, even now, but scarcely subsist, for the benefit of one already more flourishing.

Your memorialists cannot so far distrust appearances as to believe, that manufacturing is not, at this moment, the most flourishing species of industry in our country. The establishments for this purpose, erected within the last two or three years, and still erecting, are immense. We know of none, in this quarter of our country, which do not indicate as high a degree of prosperity, at least, as has fallen to the lot of those of the commercial and agricultural class.

We forbear, at present, to go further into the general principles connected with this proposition; as, on a former occasion, at a Convention from the agricultural and commercial sections of the state of Maine, by a memorial now on the files of the House of Representatives, to which we beg leave to refer, the leading grounds upon which we stand opposed to the alteration of the Impost, for the purpose of encouraging manufactures, were fully developed.

And as in duty bound, &c. &c.

